

MACOMB COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT HEPATITIS B INFORMATION SHEET

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. The virus is found in the blood and body fluids of infected people. Many cases are mild and gone within 6 months. Some go on to become carriers for the rest of their lives infecting others. Some go on to develop chronic liver disease and may develop liver cancer.

What are the symptoms?

- lack of appetite
- weight loss
- yellowing of the skin or eyes
- fever
- nausea and vomiting
- muscle and joint pain
- itching skin
- dark colored urine
- light colored stools

Most children and about half of all adults who get hepatitis B never feel sick at all. However, others become so ill they need to be hospitalized. A blood test for hepatitis B may not show the infection until 2-6 months after exposure to the virus. Symptoms appear from 6 weeks to 9 months after exposure.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by direct contact with infected blood or body fluids. It can be spread through tattooing, body piercing, injecting drugs, needle sticks, oral and sexual contact. Pregnant women who are infected can pass the virus to their baby. The virus is not spread by shaking hands, hugging, sharing food or drink.

Who is at risk of getting Hepatitis B?

People at greatest risk for getting Hepatitis B are:

- IV drug users
- people with many sexual partners
- sexual partners of an infected person
- family and housemates of an infected person
- healthcare workers
- infants born to infected mothers
- international travelers

How is it treated?

There is no specific treatment once symptoms appear. A healthy diet and avoiding alcohol will help protect your liver. If you think you have been exposed, call your doctor immediately for a blood test.

How is it prevented?

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get vaccinated against the disease. Hepatitis B vaccine is available through the Macomb County Health Department.

- don't share needles, toothbrushes, eating utensils, needles or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids
- use a condom with a water-based lubricant when you have sex
- wear latex gloves when coming in contact with body fluids

If you have Hepatitis B:

- don't donate blood, plasma, body parts or sperm
- cover open sores or other breaks in your skin
- be tested to see if you are a chronic carrier